

Grapes of laugh: Serious wines with silly names

Wine columnist Edward Deitch tests out bottles with wild and crazy labels

By Edward Deitch

Wine columnist
TODAY
Updated: 2:06 p.m. MT Aug 8, 2007

I'm a little afraid to admit this, but I actually enjoyed two wines recently with the names — now brace yourselves — (oops) and Joe Blow. Okay, now that I've gotten that off my chest, I'll remind you that I am naturally skeptical of such labels, whether they employ attention-grabbing names like these, or what I'll call the Noah's Ark approach to selling wine — appealing to animal lovers with all kinds of furry creatures, birds and fish on the bottles.

Many people buy wines by connecting with labels and, while I am not trying to take anything away from the marketing prowess that goes into these efforts, it's worth remembering that, in terms of quality, what's on the outside of the bottle may not bear any relation to what's inside.



Joe Blow

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That said, both the 2006 Sauvignon Blanc from (oops) and the 2005 California Red from Joe Blow Wine Cellars are worth considering. The (oops) line of wines is from Chile and the name refers to the fact that the red carmenère grape was thought to be merlot until the mid-1990s when a viticulturist discovered the mistake. Fast-forward a dozen years and a new wine brand was born.



There's carmenère in all the (oops) wines and it's even blended (15 percent) into the \$12 sauvignon blanc, which sounded kind of strange but made for a very good wine that was fresh, easy-to-drink and interesting; racy yet round with notes of pink grapefruit, orange and lime. It's a versatile wine for casual sipping or to enjoy with fish and chicken.

Now on to Joe Blow. I'll let you judge the name; it will no doubt turn off some, appeal to others and get its share of laughs as well as sales. The red wine is a blend of five varieties — syrah, merlot, petite sirah, zinfandel and cabernet sauvignon — and will set you back \$10.

When it comes to bargain wines from California, blends like this represent some of the best values, a fact that Randall Gram and his Bonny Doon Vineyard established some years ago with the popular Big House Red and Big House White brands. They were gimmicky but good.

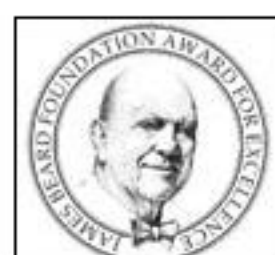
Joe Blow red has a fair amount of complexity for the price, with aromas and tastes of blueberry, black cherry, tobacco and spice. It will match with a variety of quick-fix meals, from pizza and pasta to burgers and chicken on the grill. Try chilling it for 20 minutes to make it more refreshing in the warm weather (there's also a white that I found less interesting).

"This wine is serious," Joe Blow explains on the bottle. "The label is not." Okay, maybe the lesson here is to lighten up a little. If nothing else, I have a friend who will want to put Joe Blow next to another wine he

prominently displays, the one with the famous blonde painted on his prized bottle of Marilyn Merlot.

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Edward Deitch's wine column appears Wednesdays. He is the recipient of the 2007 James Beard Foundation Journalism Award for Best Multimedia Writing. He welcomes comments from readers. Write to him at edwarddeitch@hotmail.com

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